

Amendments to the Claims:

Claims 1 through 32 (cancelled)

33. (Previously Presented) A bridge plate for use in permitting a vehicle to be conducted between respective vehicle decks of a pair of adjacently coupled first and second rail road cars, said bridge plate comprising:

a beam member for extending between the two adjacently coupled railroad cars, the beam member having a first end for engaging the first rail road car, and a second end for engaging the second rail road car;

said beam member having an upper flange, a lower flange, and webs extending between said upper and lower flanges to form a hollow section;

said upper flange of said beam member having a track surface upon which the vehicle can be conducted;

said first end of said beam member having a pivot fitting mounted thereto;

said pivot fitting permitting movement of said beam about a pivot axis normal to said track surface.

34. (Previously Presented) The bridge plate of claim 33 wherein said bridge plate has three of said webs.

35. (Previously Presented) The bridge plate of claim 33 wherein said bridge plate has a length measured from the first end to the second end and has a lengthwise slot defined in said second end.

36. (Previously Presented) The bridge plate of claim 35 wherein at least one of said webs lies to either side of said slot.

37. (Previously Presented) The bridge plate of claim 35 wherein said slot is defined clear through both said upper and lower flanges.

38. (Previously Presented) The bridge plate of claim 35 wherein said second end of said bridge plate is bifurcated to define a pair of toes, said slot being defined between said toes.

39. (Previously Presented) The bridge plate of claim 34 wherein said first end is chamfered.

40. (Previously Presented) The bridge plate of claim 33 wherein said bridge plate has at least four of said webs extending parallel to each other, and running lengthwise said first and second ends.

41. (Previously Presented) The bridge plate of claim 33 wherein said bridge plate is made of aluminium.

42. (Previously Presented) The bridge plate of claim 33 wherein said surface of said upper flange has tread bars affixed thereto.

43. (Previously Presented) The bridge plate of claim 33 wherein said lower flange has a plastic bearing pad mounted thereto.

44. (Previously Presented) The bridge plate of claim 33 further comprising a hand grab mounted to said second end thereof to facilitate pivotal manipulation of said beam member relative to said axis.

45. (Previously Presented) The bridge plate of claim 33 wherein one of said pivot pins is removable.

46. (Previously Presented) The bridge plate of claim 33 wherein said second pivot pin is removable to facilitate disengagement of said bridge plate from the second rail road car.

47. (New) A rail road car bridge plate operable to permit a vehicle to be conducted between respective vehicle decks of a pair of first and second longitudinally coupled rail road cars, said bridge plate comprising:

a beam locatable in a longitudinal orientation relative to the rail road cars to span a gap therebetween, said beam having first and second ends; said beam having a surface upon which the vehicle can be conducted; said beam having a fitting by which to mount said beam to the first of the rail road cars; said fitting being operable to accommodate yawing of said beam relative to the first rail road car when said beam is located in the longitudinal orientation and the rail road cars are in motion; and said fitting permitting movement of said beam from said longitudinal orientation to a cross-wise orientation relative to the first rail road car when said beam is disengaged from the second rail road car, wherein said second end of said beam has the form of a bifurcated toe

48. (New) A bridge plate for spanning a length-wise gap between corresponding vehicle decks of a pair of first and second releasably coupled rail road cars, said bridge plate comprising:

- a beam member for supporting the weight of a wheeled vehicle, said beam member having an upwardly facing surface upon which the vehicle can be conducted between the rail road cars, said beam having first and second ends;
- a first fitting for engaging the first rail road car;
- a second fitting for engaging the second rail road car;
- said first fitting being mountable to connect said first end of said beam to the first rail road car, said first fitting permitting pivotal motion of said bridge plate relative to the first rail road car about a first axis normal to said surface;
- said second fitting being mountable to connect said second end of said beam to the second rail road car, said second fitting permitting pivotal motion of said bridge plate relative to the second rail road car about a second axis normal to said surface;
- said second fitting being operable to accommodate variation of distance between the first and second axes while said rail road cars are coupled together and in motion and one of said first and second fittings being disengageable, wherein said second end of said beam is bifurcated to form a pair of toes, and said second fitting is a slot defined between said toes.

49. (New) A bridge plate for spanning a length-wise gap between corresponding vehicle decks of a pair of first and second releasably coupled rail road cars, said bridge plate comprising:

 a beam member for supporting the weight of a wheeled vehicle, said beam member having an upwardly facing surface upon which the vehicle can be conducted between the rail road cars, said beam having first and second ends;

 a first fitting for engaging the first rail road car;

 a second fitting for engaging the second rail road car;

 said first fitting being mountable to connect said first end of said beam to the first rail road car, said first fitting permitting pivotal motion of said bridge plate relative to the first rail road car about a first axis normal to said surface;

 said second fitting being mountable to connect said second end of said beam to the second rail road car, said second fitting permitting pivotal motion of said bridge plate relative to the second rail road car about a second axis normal to said surface;

 said second fitting being operable to accommodate variation of distance between the first and second axes while said rail road cars are coupled together and in motion and one of said first and second fittings being disengageable, wherein said beam includes a top flange, a bottom flange, and webs extending therebetween.

50. (New) A bridge plate for spanning a length-wise gap between corresponding vehicle decks of a pair of first and second releasably coupled rail road cars, said bridge plate comprising:

 a beam member for supporting the weight of a wheeled vehicle, said beam member having an upwardly facing surface upon which the vehicle can be conducted between the rail road cars, said beam having first and second ends;

 a first fitting for engaging the first rail road car;

 a second fitting for engaging the second rail road car;

 said first fitting being mountable to connect said first end of said beam to the first rail road car, said first fitting permitting pivotal motion of said bridge plate relative to the first rail road car about a first axis normal to said surface;

said second fitting being mountable to connect said second end of said beam to the second rail road car, said second fitting permitting pivotal motion of said bridge plate relative to the second rail road car about a second axis normal to said surface;

said second fitting being operable to accommodate variation of distance between the first and second axes while said rail road cars are coupled together and in motion and one of said first and second fittings being disengageable,

wherein said beam has a bottom flange, and a plastic pad mounted to said bottom flange.

51. (New) A bridge plate for spanning a gap between corresponding vehicle decks of a pair of first and second releasably coupled rail road cars, said bridge plate having:

a first pivot fitting mountable to the first rail road car, said pivot fitting permitting pivotal motion of said bridge plate relative to the first rail road car about a first vertical axis;

a second fitting for engaging the second rail road car, said second fitting including a linear extension member permitting pivotal motion of said bridge plate relative to a second vertical axis fixed relative to the second rail road car;

said first fitting being tolerant of yaw motion of the bridge plate relative to the first rail road car when said first fitting is mounted thereto;

said second fitting being disengageable relative to the second rail road car;

said second fitting being tolerant of yaw motion of the bridge plate relative to the second rail road car when said second fitting is engaged thereto; and

said linear extension member tolerating variation in distance between the first and second axes,

wherein said bridge plate is a beam having an upper flange, a lower flange, and vertical webs extending therebetween.

52. (New) A bridge plate kit for spanning a gap between respective vehicle decks of a pair of first and second releasably coupled rail road cars, said kit comprising:

a bridge plate;

a first pivot pin having a first pivot axis, said first pivot pin being mountable to the first rail road car with said first pivot axis in a vertical orientation;

a second pivot pin having a second pivot axis, said second pivot pin being mountable to the second rail road car with said second pivot axis in a vertical orientation;

and

said bridge plate having

a track surface upon which a vehicle can be conducted between the railroad cars

when said bridge plate is mounted to span the gap;

a first fitting in engagement with said first pivot pin, said bridge plate being pivotable relative to said first pivot axis;

a second fitting in engagement with said second pivot pin, said bridge plate being pivotable relative to said second axis;

said bridge plate being translatable relative to said second axis; and

one of said pivot pins being disengageable,

wherein said bridge plate includes a beam member for supporting loads to be conducted between said first and second rail road cars, said beam has a pair of toes at one end thereof, and said second fitting is an open ended slot defined between said toes.